

## Big Bird and James Earl Jones



FIRST DAY 123 OF ISSUE

SESAME STREET



DETROIT, MI 48233

JUNE 22, 2019



Big Bird, an 8'2" yellow bird who lives on *Sesame Street*, has been a central character for the program's run, debuting in the first episode. He makes friends easily and can roller skate, ice skate, dance, sing, write poetry, draw, and even ride a unicycle — pretty talented for a character described in the TV show's writer's guide as a 6-year-old. But despite this wide array of talents, he's prone to frequent misunderstandings, like thinking that the alphabet is one long word. James Earl Jones (b. 1931), noted for his work on stage, film, and television, and providing the voices of Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* series and Mufasa in Disney's *The Lion King*, is considered by Sesame Workshop to be the first celebrity guest on *Sesame Street*, since pedagogical inserts of the actor reciting the alphabet and counting numbers appeared in first season episodes, beginning with episode 0002.

As was mentioned, it's almost a rite of passage for famous folks to appear on *Sesame Street*. But actor James Earl Jones was the very first celebrity to pop up on the children's show. He appeared onscreen in 1969 to recite the alphabet, which may sound less than thrilling, but if you know the performer's unmistakable voice—which can also be heard as *Star Wars*' Darth Vader and *The Lion King*'s Mufasa—you can imagine why it would capture the attention of young viewers. In one appearance, it's 90 seconds of Jones methodically stating each letter of the alphabet. James Earl Jones made a few other appearances on *Sesame Street*, including a visit to Hooper's Store.

## Ernie and Aaron Neville



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Ernie has been one of the stars of *Sesame Street* since its first episode in 1969. Ernie and his best friend Bert share the basement apartment at 123 Sesame Street. Together they form a comic duo that is one of the program's centerpieces, with Ernie acting the role of the naive trouble-maker and Bert the world-weary foil. Ernie is well known for his fondness for bubble baths with his Rubber Duckie, and for trying to learn to play the saxophone although he wouldn't "put down the duckie." Ernie also is known for keeping Bert awake at night, for reasons such as wanting to play the drums, wanting to count something (like sheep), or to observe something like a blackout. In 1994, Season 25, Episode 3242, Aaron Neville (b. 1941), a vocalist both solo and with his siblings in The Neville Brothers, sang "I Don't Want to Live on the Moon" with Ernie for *Sesame Street*.

Most people are right-handed: only around 10 percent of the population is thought to be left-handed. That's why it shouldn't be surprising that most of the puppets on *Sesame Street* are also right-handed, with the exceptions being Cookie Monster and Ernie, who are both lefties. The performers who control the characters use their left hands as the puppet's dominant hand and use their right hands to move the mouths. Aaron Neville (b. 1941) is a vocalist, both solo (including Grammy-winning performances with Linda Ronstadt) and with his siblings in The Neville Brothers. He sang "I Don't Want to Live on the Moon" with Ernie for *Sesame Street*; his vocals were mixed with Jim Henson's original performance. (First: Episode 3242). Aaron is right-handed.